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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC KIRF ER

SUBJECT: ANTI-AMERICAN PFDJ RALLIES IN ASMARA

Classified By: Ambassador Ron McMullen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), Eritrea's regime-affiliated and sole political party, has been holding a series of mandatory mass meetings for all party members in Asmara. An Eritrean who attended one of these meetings relayed to the RSO that the PFDJ told its marshaled members that the United States is Eritrea's enemy and there will be no improvement in relations with the USG. Further, the Ogadeni rebels in Ethiopia are growing stronger and will soon topple the Ethiopian Government. The PFDJ spokesmen warned that the Eritrean government will continue to arrest members of non-sanctioned Christian churches in Eritrea and plans to initiate large-scale arrests in the near future. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C/NF) The PFDJ has been holding a number of compulsory meetings for its members at the Expo Center in Asmara, as well as in locations throughout the country and abroad. Articles about these meetings have been published on the regime's website, www.shabait.com. RSO Source participated in a November 30 meeting, directed by PFDJ cadre Hagos "Kisha" Ghebrehiwet and attended by approximately 3,500 Eritreans. NOTE: Ghebrehiwet is the head of economic affairs for the PFDJ. END NOTE. According to Source, Ghebrehiwet stated that rumors of improved relations with the USG because of the arrival of the new U.S. Ambassador or about a demarcation of the border with Ethiopia were untrue. The U.S. continues to be Eritrea's main enemy because of their support for Ethiopia and the new U.S. Ambassador is a spy collecting information about the GSE, Ghebrehiwet averred. Ghebrehiwet claimed Ethiopia still plans to invade Eritrea and occupy the port city of Assab. Ghebrehiwet added that Ogadeni forces in Ethiopia continue to gain strength and will soon topple the Ethiopian Government weakened by its increasing internal problems.

¶3. (C/NF) Ghebrehiwet then explained the GSE will continue to arrest Eritreans who worship at any of the non-sanctioned "evangelical" Christian churches in Eritrea. He stated all evangelical religions are puppets of the USG and are political, not religious, entities. The U.S. is using these religions to control Eritrea. Ghebrehiwet warned all audience members to tell their family members to avoid these churches or else they will be arrested as well.

¶4. (C/NF) Source stated the audience members feigned support inside the meeting and did not ask any challenging or derogatory questions for fear of being arrested for speaking against the government. However, outside of the meeting, Source overheard many people speaking against the GSE and its policies.

¶4. (C/NF) Comment: Source's information tracks with a report from an Embassy local staff member who also attended one of these meetings. End Comment.

MCMULLEN